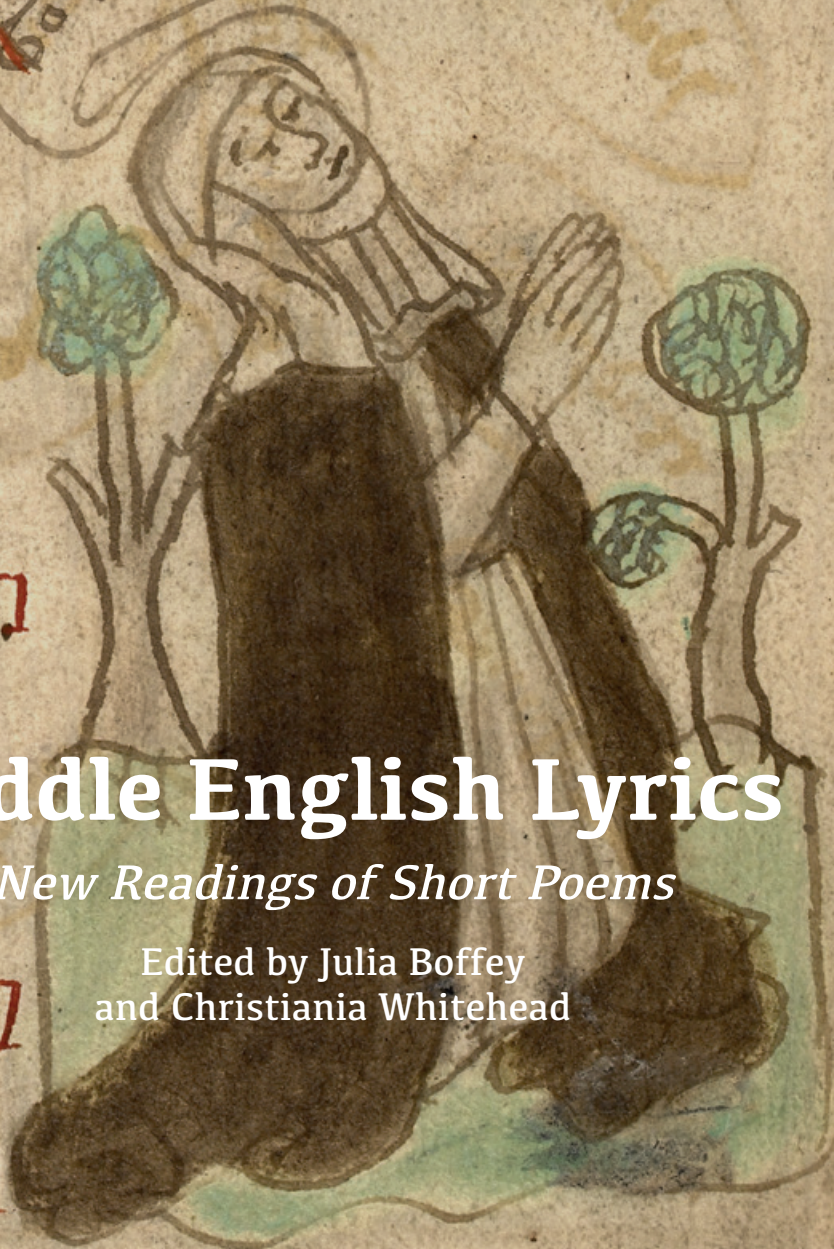


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Middle English Lyrics

New Readings of Short Poems

Edited by Julia Boffey
and Christiania Whitehead

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New Readings of Short Poems

Edited by

Julia Boffey and Christiania Whitehead

D. S. BREWER

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*Dedicated to
Thomas G. Duncan, with affection*

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Finally, we are indebted to the anonymous reader of the book proposal for this collection for his/her helpful suggestions; and likewise to Caroline Palmer and the editorial team at Boydell & Brewer, for their expertise and encouragement throughout the evolution of this volume.

Abbreviations

AH	Dreves, G. M., C. Blume and H. M. Bannister, eds, <i>Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi</i> , 55 vols (Leipzig, 1886–1922)
Benson	Benson, L. D., ed., <i>The Riverside Chaucer</i> , 3rd edn (Oxford, 1988).
BL	London, British Library
BL online	
MS catalogue	http://searcharchives.bl.uk/
BnF	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France
BodL	Oxford, Bodleian Library
Brook	Brook, G. L., ed., <i>The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of Ms. Harley 2253</i> , 4th edn (Manchester, 1968)
Brown XIII	Brown, C., ed., <i>Religious Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century</i> (Oxford, 1932)
Brown XIV	Brown, C., ed., <i>Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century</i> , 2nd edn, revised by G. V. Smithers (Oxford, 1952)
Brown XV	Brown, C., ed., <i>Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century</i> (Oxford, 1939)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DIMEV	Mooney, L. R., D. W. Mosser and E. Solopova, <i>Digital Index of Middle English Verse</i> . Online: http://www.dimev.net
Douay-Rheims	Douay-Rheims/Douay-Challoner Bible. <i>The Holy Bible, Douay Version: Translated from the Latin Vulgate</i> (Douay, A.D. 1609: Rheims, A.D. 1582) (London, 1956). Online: www.catholicbible.online
Duncan,	
Companion	Duncan, T. G., ed., <i>A Companion to the Middle English Lyric</i> (Cambridge, 2005)
Duncan	Duncan, T. G., ed., <i>Medieval English Lyrics and Carols</i> (Cambridge, 2013)
EETS	Early English Text Society
ES	Extra Series
EUL	Edinburgh University Library
Gray, Selection	Gray, D., ed., <i>A Selection of English Medieval Religious</i>

Abbreviations

	<i>Lyrics</i> (Oxford, 1975; reprinted Exeter, 1992)
Gray, <i>Themes</i>	Gray, D., <i>Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric</i> (London, 1972)
Greene	Greene, R. L., ed., <i>The Early English Carols</i> , 2nd edn (Oxford, 1977)
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , ed. H. Kurath and S. M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor and London, 1952–). Online: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/
NIMEV	Boffey, J. and A. S. G. Edwards, <i>A New Index of Middle English Verse</i> (London, 2005)
NLS	Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland
NS	New Series
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OS	Original Series
PG	Migne, J. P., ed. <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus ... Series Graeca</i> [<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>], 161 vols (Paris, 1857–66)
PL	Migne, J. P., ed., <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus ... Series Latina</i> [<i>Patrologia Latina</i>], 221 vols (Paris, 1844–55 and 1862–65)
PO	Graffin, R., et al., <i>Patrologia Orientalis</i> , 56 vols (Paris and Turnhout, 1903–)
Robbins <i>Hist.</i>	Robbins, R. H., ed., <i>Historical Poems of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries</i> (New York, 1959)
Robbins <i>Sec.</i>	Robbins, R. H., ed., <i>Secular Lyrics of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries</i> , revised edn (Oxford, 1952)
SS	Supplementary Series
Woolf	Woolf, R., <i>The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages</i> (Oxford, 1968)

Introduction

Julia Boffey and Christiania Whitehead

The aim of this collection of essays is to remind readers of the extraordinary richness of the body of Middle English poems conventionally, if not always unproblematically, held to be lyrics. ‘The reader of Middle English lyrics need never want for variety’, as Thomas G. Duncan noted in the introduction to the first of two anthologies of lyrics that he compiled for Penguin Classics.¹ Well over two thousand of these poems survive from the years between about 1066 and 1500, strikingly variegated in terms of subject matter, length and form, and constituting an important point of entry into an understanding of medieval English culture.² They illuminate religious teaching and pious practice, contemporary conditions and events, the history of feelings and emotions, and reveal much about the ways that speech, song, image and performance related to the written word. Outside the contexts of cultural and literary history, their modes invite analysis of some of the abiding concerns of poetics: voice and moment, shape and cadence. Surviving as inscriptions on tombstones, as graffiti, and on artefacts such as rings and jugs as well as in a variety of written forms in manuscripts, they are testimony to the range of functions fulfilled by medieval verse in many contexts, and to the value and significance that was attached to it.

The variety that characterises this body of poems has proved in the past to be something of an impediment to sustainedly productive scholarship and analysis. Although much industry went into the early collection and editing of ballads, when it came to lyrics most nineteenth-century editors of Middle English verse were understandably more attracted by the challenge of longer works than by the prospect of assembling anthologies from short poems scattered in a range of geographically dispersed witnesses. The earliest relevant collections produced for the Early English Text Society, Furnivall’s *Political, Religious and Love Poems*

¹ T. G. Duncan, ed., *Medieval English Lyrics 1200–1400* (Harmondsworth, 1995), p. xxvii.

² The figure of two thousand is an approximation derived from Robbins *Sec.*, p. xvii. For an admirable conspectus of available editions of lyrics and of associated scholarship, see R. Greentree, *The Middle English Lyric and Short Poem*, Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature, 7 (Cambridge, 2001).

from *Lambeth 306 and Other Sources* and *Hymns to the Virgin and Christ and Other Religious Poems*, Kail's edition of the Digby lyrics and Murray's editions of variant texts of *Erthe upon erthe*, focused specifically on single manuscripts or small groups of witnesses, and in the last case on just a single poem.³ The anthology of *Early English Lyrics* edited by E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick for publication in 1907 seems to have been the first attempt at a representative selection, and its categories of 'amorous, divine, moral and trivial' were to be influential on the focus of later collections, including Carleton Brown's three important editions of religious lyrics and R. H. Robbins's of secular ones.⁴

Early English Lyrics was a landmark in other ways. In grouping its texts together as 'lyrics' it gave currency to a useful and appealing catch-all term for the forms of short or shortish verse that earlier editors had simply called 'poems'. The term would be further authorised in the titles of Brown's and Robbins's anthologies, and in collections such as G. L. Brook's *Harley Lyrics*.⁵ In addition, *Early English Lyrics* suggested ways of approaching these poems that were to be influential on shaping later critical trends. The essay 'Aspects of Medieval Lyric' provided for the anthology by Chambers had much to say on the one hand about the relationships of lyrics to music, minstrelsy and folksong, and on the other about their capacity to convey 'the emotions ... which a man tells to his own heart in solitude'.⁶ While neither of these approaches may now seem especially relevant to the many pragmatically handy or straightforwardly comic forms of short poem among the corpus of Middle English lyrics, they opened attractive possibilities for critical analysis addressing musicality and the lyric voice. In invoking in his essay the poetry of troubadours and *trouvères* Chambers also indicated profitable ways of contextualising Middle English lyrics in a wider continental corpus.

Although Chambers's emphasis on 'the folk' may have come to seem exaggerated,⁷ the central preoccupations of his essay have in many respects proved both durable and productive. The musical dimensions of Middle English lyrics have been explored in studies of form, for example, especially of the carol; and in cultural analyses that relate their use and currency to social functions.⁸ C. S. Lewis's characterisation of early Tudor lyrics as 'words for music' has been particularly influential, stimulating important studies of the conventions of

3 F. J. Furnivall, ed., *Political, Religious and Love Poems from Lambeth 306 and Other Sources*, EETS OS 15 (London, 1866), and *Hymns to the Virgin and Christ and Other Religious Poems*, EETS OS 24 (London, 1867); J. Kail, ed., *Twenty-Six Political and other Poems*, EETS OS 124 (London, 1904); H. M. R. Murray, ed., *The Middle English Poem 'Erthe Upon Erthe'*, EETS OS 141 (London, 1911).

4 E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick, eds, *Early English Lyrics* (London, 1907); Brown XIII, Brown XIV and Brown XV; Robbins Sec.

5 Brook.

6 Chambers and Sidgwick, eds, *Early English Lyrics*, p. 260.

7 For recent discussion of the 'folk' elements of early lyric, see D. Gray, *Simple Forms: Essays on Medieval English Popular Literature* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 215–31.

8 See for example the introductions to Greene and to Robbins, Sec.

short forms of courtly verse.⁹ Alongside these studies much energy has gone into making available the repertory of surviving musical settings found in manuscript copies with the texts of lyrics.¹⁰ This work has taken place in the context of a revival of interest in early music, which has given new prominence to medieval lyrics in both concert performance and recordings. At the same time, freshly accessible editions of the texts of Middle English lyrics, from Chambers and Sidgwick onwards, have made them available to successive generations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century composers and musicians: Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Britten and Steeleye Span are just a few of those for whom they have proved attractive.¹¹

The 'lyric voice' that exerted such a powerful appeal on Chambers has remained a matter of interest, if inflected in more recent discussion by newer preoccupations with the subject and the gaze. One dimension of this power derives, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, from the anonymity of many lyrics, and the associated fact that for twentieth-century readers of editions like that of Chambers and Sidgwick, the poems tend to be presented bare of annotation of constraining kinds. Critical energies were able to take free rein with these disembodied texts, using them occasionally as demonstration pieces. Leo Spitzer's 1951 essay '*Explication de texte* Applied to Three Great Middle English Poems' remains one of the classics of this genre.¹² Short, anonymous forms of verse turned out to be especially hospitable to twentieth-century new critical experiments with the poem as verbal icon or well-wrought urn.¹³

More recently, the formal turn in the study of poetics has directed attention in newer ways to the appealing range of stanzaic and metrical variety in the Middle English lyric corpus. Carols, Middle English variations on the French *formes fixes* of *ballade*, *rondeau* and *virelai*, and the pervasive use of alliteration in lyric forms have all been the subjects of study. These kinds of approach have necessarily

- 9 C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), p. 230; J. E. Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period* (London, 1961, repr. Cambridge, 1979), especially pp. 154–202.
- 10 E. J. Dobson and F. L. Harrison, *Medieval English Songs* (London, 1979); J. E. Stevens, ed., *Medieval Carols*, Musica Britannica 4 (London, 1958); *Music at the Court of Henry VIII*, Musica Britannica 18 (London, 1962), and *Early Tudor Songs and Carols*, Musica Britannica 36 (London, 1975); D. Fallows, *A Catalogue of Polyphonic Songs* (Oxford, 1999) and ed., *The Henry VIII Book* (British Library, Add. MS 31922), DIAMM facsimiles 4 (Oxford, 2014).
- 11 See D. Fuller, 'Lyrics, Sacred and Secular', *A Companion to Medieval Poetry*, ed. C. Saunders (Chichester, 2010), pp. 258–76 (p. 272); for Steeleye Span and *Westron wynde* see <https://mainlynorfolk.info/steeleye.span/songs/westronwynde.html> (accessed 25/7/2017).
- 12 In *Archivum Linguisticum*, 3 (1951), 1–22, 157–65. The poems concerned are 'Ichot a burde in boure bryht', with refrain 'Blow northerne wynde' (NIMEV 1395, DIMEV 2325), 'Lestenyt lordynges boþe elde and 3yng'e' (NIMEV 1893, DIMEV 3114) and 'I syng of a myden þat is makeles' (NIMEV 1367, DIMEV 2281).
- 13 Phrases from seminal books by W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, KY, 1954) and C. Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York, 1947).

worked comparatively, and in the light of as much understanding as possible of the particular contexts in which lyrics were conceived, copied and used, thus addressing form and function in combination. Even though the mid-twentieth-century tendency may have been to read lyrics as ‘poems without contexts’ (in John Burrow’s memorable phrase),¹⁴ most editions supplied, somewhere in their apparatus, information about textual witnesses from which a sense of context could be excavated; and the amounts of this made available have grown steadily more useful. R. L. Greene’s edition of *The Early English Carols*, for example, while grouping its contents thematically, also supplied extensive information about textual witnesses, and his introduction explored at length the contexts in which carols may have been read, sung and circulated; Douglas Gray’s smaller edition of selected religious lyrics offered detail of the same kinds.¹⁵ It has become increasingly possible to perceive the dynamic features of these poems, and the range of contexts – instructional, devotional or social – in which they may have played a role. Editions devoted to the lyrics of single manuscripts, such as those making available John of Grimestone’s sermon notes in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates’ MS 18. 7. 21 or the poems of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 102,¹⁶ enable a still more detailed reconstruction of some of the circumstances in which these poems had a life.

Much criticism has responded to lyrics as if they somehow came into being without authorial intervention, and indeed an impressionistic glance at the Middle English corpus may suggest a body of largely anonymous poems. But substantial numbers are fairly firmly attributable to known authors, whose larger *oeuvres* supply other forms of productive contexts for understanding. William Herebert, James Ryman, John Audelay, Charles d’Orléans and John Lydgate were between them evidently responsible for large numbers of short poems; small clutches also survive from what may once have been larger bodies of lyrics produced by Minot, Chaucer, Hoccleve and Skelton.¹⁷ Recent new editions of the works of Herebert, Audelay and Charles d’Orléans, and the scholarship they have prompted, have indicated the extent to which the arrangement and sequencing of short poems can be a significant part of their collective meaning.¹⁸ Similarly, the relationship of lyrics to larger contexts in which they are embedded, as in some of the works of Richard Rolle, or in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* or Skelton’s

14 J. A. Burrow, ‘Poems without Contexts: the Poems of Bodl. Rawl. D. 913’, *Essays in Criticism* 29 (1979), 6–32, reprinted in *Essays in Middle English Literature* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 1–26.

15 See Greene, and Gray, *Selection*.

16 E. Wilson, ed., *A Descriptive Index of the English Lyrics in John of Grimestone’s Preaching Book*, Medium Aevum Monographs, NS 2 (Oxford, 1973); H. Barr, ed., *The Digby Poems: A New Edition of the Lyrics* (Exeter, 2009).

17 For details, see the subject index to NIMEV and the searchable ‘Author’ field in DIMEV.

18 S. R. Reimer, ed., *The Works of William Herebert* (Toronto, 1987); S. G. Fein, ed., *John the Blind Audelay, Poems and Carols* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 302) (Kalamazoo, MI, 2009); M.-J. Arn, ed., *Fortunes Stabilnes: Charles of Orléans’s English Book of Love: A Critical Edition* (New York, 1994).

Garland of Laurel, have generated productive insights. Some of the attributable bodies of lyrics are preserved with manuscript apparatus full of useful pointers about the Middle English terminology appropriate to short poems: authors and scribes used for this verse words like *dite*, *tretys* and *traitie*, *song*, *complaynt* and *balade*, sometimes drawing attention to formal features, elsewhere to discursive function.

That details of this kind are coming to the fore in lyric scholarship is in part a result of the material turn in literary studies – a move that has illuminated understanding of premodern literary production in particular. The appeal of this new turn is at one level quite straightforward: to find a lyric inscribed on a spare part of an administrative document, or noted in the margins of a service book, or incised above a doorway, is a discovery that makes suddenly very clear the fact that these poems were a part of life, actually used by individuals for their own purposes. At another level, new attention to the original recording of lyrics in legible form, whether scribally or by some other means, is also making apparent the textual challenges that they sometimes pose, and the larger insights about matters such as literary composition, scribal practice and transmission, reading and reception to be derived from unravelling these.

In many different ways, these short and often ephemeral-seeming poems are inviting, miniature testing grounds for investigating medieval cultural practice and production. Their potential in this regard was abundantly demonstrated in the books produced within a few years of each other by Rosemary Woolf and by Douglas Gray – *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968) and *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London, 1972) – which in differently inflected ways directed attention to the bodies of exegesis, instruction and practice to which lyrics make reference in characteristically compressed form. The important influence of these books has been reinforced by the availability of a range of new editions of lyrics by Douglas Gray, John Hirsh and Thomas G. Duncan,¹⁹ in all of which the larger-informing contexts of medieval knowledge, instruction, literary form and convention are made prominent, and which supply necessary information about textual matters and the forms in which lyrics were recorded and transmitted. While there have been barely any book-length studies of the Middle English lyric over the last fifteen years, nonetheless, these lyrics have entered many textual conversations and made their presence felt in books and articles with other overall emphases. As such, it is possible to discern a number of distinctively new approaches towards them, some of which are picked up and developed by the essays in our collection.

First, with regard to late Middle English religiosity, *affect* has taken centre stage: the expression or incitement of feeling, most recently interpreted using tools from ‘history of emotions’ studies. Clearly, this focus lends itself well to

19 Gray, *Selection*; J. Hirsh, ed., *Medieval Lyric: Middle English Lyrics, Ballads, and Carols* (Oxford, 2004); T. G. Duncan, ed., *Medieval English Lyrics 1200–1400* and *Late Medieval English Lyrics and Carols 1400–1530* (Harmondsworth, 1995 and 2000), later followed by Duncan.

the expressions of pathos that dominate many religious lyrics and, accordingly, these kinds of poems have often been the subject of renewed attention, read with an eye to their affective impact both in public and solitary settings.²⁰ There are important issues at stake here differentiating *affect* within the medieval lyric from Romantic and post-Romantic perceptions, most fully laid out by Hegel, of the lyric as the textual place where the private subject voices his or her moods and passions, and makes sense of the emotions that populate their inner life. ‘History of emotion’ studies has alerted us to the ‘situatedness’ of the emotions and their expression – dolour in an Emily Dickinson lyric is probably not at all the same thing as dolour in a fourteenth-century Marian lament. More specifically, Sarah McNamer, Jessica Brantley and others have brought lyric affect into relation with performativity, and have posed the possibility that many lyrics may function as ‘scripts for feeling’, mapping an exemplary set of emotional responses to the crucifixion or the nativity, which may be ‘played out’ publicly from a pulpit or privately within a household or cell, by indefinite numbers of devout speakers and readers.²¹ In this collection, the essays of A. S. Lazikani, Daniel McCann and Hetta Howes focus on affective complexity and the representation of ‘shame’, building on many of these recent insights.

The idea of ‘devotional performance’ might, on the face of it, seem not completely dissimilar to the tendency of postwar Anglo-American New Criticism to identify the lyric speaker as a fictional persona, essentially turning the lyric into a dramatic monologue. That tendency has been discredited in the most recent transhistorical discussions of lyric, and replaced with a non-fictive, non-mimetic understanding of its voice and genre.²² Again, work needs to be done to differentiate the voice of medieval lyric ‘performance’ from twentieth-century notions of ‘persona’, but David Lawton offers a useful opening through his discernment of a ‘public interiority’ governing much vernacular secular and devotional poetry, that is, an ‘I’ voice, simultaneously intimate yet available for use by many, vocalising desire, self-loathing, contrition and the will to reform, in the confidence that those expressions will fulfil the affective requirements of a wide spectrum of devotees.²³ This ‘public interiority’ is something very different from post-Romantic perceptions of the individual subject, set against society, and its fictional derivative, ‘persona’. Denis Renevey’s essay in this volume, building

20 S. McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2010), was one of the most influential studies in this field. More recent books maintaining the same affective focus include A. S. Lazikani, *Cultivating the Heart: Feeling and Emotion in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Religious Texts* (Cardiff, 2015), which includes a chapter on the Passion lyrics.

21 J. Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago, 2007), examines the ways in which the lyrics, poems and prayer texts in the important religious anthology, BL, Additional MS 37049, were read performatively within the Carthusian cell.

22 J. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Boston, 2015), maps and approves this critical change of direction.

23 D. Lawton, *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature: Public Interiorities* (Oxford, 2017).

on these debates, examines the construction of one particular ‘I’ voice, that of the authorial self, in Charles d’Orléans’s English poetry, and notes the potential of the short poem to offer a space where authorial intentions can be asserted and discussed. Mary Wellesley, similarly focused on the authorial ‘I’, charts the way in which the writing process and the physical book are given pride of place as a spur to devotion in Lydgate’s *Fifteen Joys and Sorrows of Mary*.

In addition to affect and performativity, recent attention has also turned to the relation of medieval verse to the visual and musical arts, and to the *visuality* of these texts: their ability to conjure a mental picture. There has been a new willingness to read lyric poetry alongside a variety of visual expressions of devotion: church wall paintings, stained-glass programmes, sculptures and manuscript illuminations, and to view them as complementary modes, capable of augmenting and modifying one another’s meaning. Jessica Brantley’s 2007 monograph, reading text alongside image in London, British Library, Additional MS 37049, offers a seminal example of this approach.²⁴ It is continued in this volume by Katherine Zieman’s energising interpretation of lyrics and iconography within a single opening in BL, Additional MS 37049, by A. S. Lazikani’s sensitive juxtaposition of *On leome is in þis world ilist* with thirteenth-century insular church wall painting, and by Anne Marie D’Arcy’s exploration of aureated verse in praise of the Virgin in relation to dazzlingly ornamented plastic representations of Mary in fifteenth-century culture.

The relation of medieval poetry to music has proved, if anything, even more fruitful. Over the last fifteen years a lively interdisciplinary exchange has sprung up between literary scholars and musicologists, dedicated to restoring the sonic dimensions of the lyric and the literary qualities of song.²⁵ The new discipline of ‘sound studies’ has played an important role in this; we are now beginning to register and record the presence of ‘soundscapes’ within medieval texts, and to interrogate the relation between word and sound. Voice is receiving increasing attention. These new currents are represented in this volume by Christiania Whitehead’s examination of the part played by liturgical music in determining the dialogic structure of a well-known Passion lyric.

Interest in the sonic qualities of short poems has gone hand in hand with a new attentiveness to poetic form, evident throughout the discipline as a whole. The effects of rhyme, rhythm, repetition and sound patterning through the use of homonyms and other linguistic tools, upon the construction of meaning, have all become renewed and adventurous topics of consideration. Jonathan Culler

24 Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*.

25 In relation to French lyric and music, see A. Butterfield, *Poetry and Music in Medieval France* (Cambridge, 2002); E. Dillon, *The Sense of Sound: Musical Meaning in France, 1260–1300* (Oxford, 2012); ‘Unwriting Medieval Song’, *New Literary History* 46 (2015), 595–622. In relation to English lyric and music, see H. Deeming, *Song in British Sources, c.1150–1300* (London, 2013), and more generally, E. E. Leach, *Sung Birds: Music, Nature and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2007); H. Deeming and E. E. Leach, eds, *Manuscripts and Medieval Song: Inscription, Performance, Context* (Cambridge, 2015).

has recently called for more importance to be given to form, both in relation to how we determine a lyric genre and how we register a lyric's impact, although he tends to discern a long-standing tension between form and linguistic meaning, which may not always hold true for the medieval corpus under survey.²⁶ Cristina Cervone, in one of only two recent book-length studies of Middle English poetics, similarly centralises form, although in her case, she interprets form more generously to encompass complex figuration and patterns of imagery.²⁷ In this volume, the effects of rhyme, rhythm, sound patterning and wordplay upon lyric meaning are variously explored in the essays of Daniel McCann, Jane Griffiths and Joel Grossman, while Thomas G. Duncan passionately defends the importance of metre and syllabic count to editorial decision making.

Cervone's focus on figuration arises from her thesis that poetic language is capable of embodying theological complexities and paradoxes that fall outside the purview of 'plain' language. This acknowledgement of the intellectual sophistication underpinning some religious figuration stands as a welcome corrective to the priority accorded to affect over the last decade (which can sometimes be construed in opposition to the intellect). An equivalent respect for the sophistication of vernacular figures, with regard to their capacity to propound literary theories, also informs recent work by Nicolette Zeeman.²⁸ Such threads are represented in this volume by Denis Renevey's revelation of poetic forms configured as banqueting dishes in Charles d'Orléans's *Ballade* 84, and Joel Grossman's scrutiny of the intellectual formal play that underpins Thomas Wyatt's menacing love lyrics.

Through the twentieth century, anthologies of medieval lyrics tended to be monolingual, extracting lyrics from their frequently multilingual manuscript contexts, subordinating or suppressing variant versions, and organising them into categories: 'the love lyric', 'the religious lyric', and so on, which gave very little sense of the mixed textual environments from which they originated. Over the last ten years, this approach has been supplemented by a very welcome emphasis on the 'whole book': that is, by editions that *retain* the lyric within its manuscript environment, enabling a much more satisfying appreciation of its situated function, and original circumstances of reading and reception. The flagship edition in this respect is undoubtedly the monumental, three-volume edition of London, British Library, Harley MS 2253, published 2014–15,²⁹ which truthfully reproduces the trilingual contents of the manuscript in the order in which they

26 Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*.

27 C. M. Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation: Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love* (Philadelphia, 2012). There has also been a recent focus on alliterative metrics: A. Putter, J. Jefferson and M. Stokes, *Studies in the Metres of Alliterative Verse* (Oxford, 2007); J. Jefferson and A. Putter, eds, *Approaches to the Metres of Alliterative Verse* (Leeds, 2009).

28 N. Zeeman, 'Imaginative Theory', *Middle English*, ed. P. Strohm (Oxford, 2007), pp. 222–40.

29 S. Fein, ed. and trans., with D. Raybin and J. Ziolkowski, *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript, Volumes 1–3*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, MI, 2014–15). I. Nelson's chapter on Harley 2253 in *Lyric Tactics: Poetry, Genre and Practice in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia,

were copied (together with facing translations, which render the Latin and French texts more readily accessible), demonstrating how comprehensively short verse intermingled with longer poetry and prose in other genres (saints' legends, biblical narratives and so on), and revealing the differing themes and agendas embedded in distinct booklets of the manuscript, often expressed via a generically varied choice of both poetry and prose. The edition of Harley 2253 has perhaps excited most interest, but we should also note Jessica Brantley's earlier study of Additional 37049, which devotes similar attention to the 'whole book'; Susanna Fein's 2009 edition of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 302: a collection of John Audelay's poems and prayers, apparently supervised by the author; and John Fox and Mary-Jo Arn's 2010 edition of Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 25458, the manuscript that contains Charles d'Orléans's personal collection of French lyrics composed by the duke, his household and friends.³⁰ Recent attention to the 'whole book' has brought into relief the textual sequences that may be embedded within it, and may travel between different manuscripts. Susanna Fein introduces us to one such sequence, extant in Oxford, Jesus College, MS 29, in her essay in this collection. It has also engendered a much greater awareness of interlinguistic relationships and exchanges. Languages may rub up against one another comfortably or contestively within a single manuscript. They can also do the same within a single poem, and Mary C. Flannery's reading of a short macaronic lyric in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 104 reveals a jovial scenario in which Latin and Middle English alternate to reveal mutual linguistic and moral shortcomings.

The editors of Harley 2253 implore us to let go of category terms: political lyric, courtly love lyric, and so on. If we are not to convene essays on a single 'whole book' (and that has already been carried out very ably in relation to Harley 2253 and the Auchinleck manuscript),³¹ then perhaps the best place to start is with the single poem. More than one recent writer upon medieval poetry has prioritised *close reading*, again a trend discernible well beyond medieval literary scholarship.³² But what should this entail? How has our close reading changed from the groundbreaking lyric readings of Woolf and Gray, to whom we remain indebted? Ardis Butterfield provides us with some fruitful suggestions in her important 2015 essay, 'Why Medieval Lyric?'³³ Citing the extraordinary changeability of the medieval short poem – its propensity to change shape, size, spelling and verse order every time it is copied – which she appraises in positive

2017), pp. 31–58, shows the influence of this recent trend, paying due attention to the manuscript's trilingual lyricism.

30 Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*; Fein, ed., *John the Blind Audelay, Poems and Carols*; J. Fox and M.-J. Arn, eds, *The Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and his Circle: A Critical Edition of BnF MS Fr. 25458* (Tempe, AZ, 2010).

31 S. Fein, ed., *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, MI, 2000); S. Fein, ed., *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives* (York, 2016).

32 Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation*.

33 A. Butterfield, 'Why Medieval Lyric?', *English Literary History* 82 (2015), 319–43, responding to J. Culler's 2010 Cornell lecture, 'Why Lyric?'

terms as its ‘textual dynamism’, she urges scholars to discard outdated ideas of a preferred or authoritative version, and instead to ‘observe the protean and mobile core of a verse cluster traverse the landscape of a medieval intellectual’s memory’, keeping also in mind its ‘shadowy hinterland of additional textual ... material’.³⁴ This chimes well with a number of the reading practices in this collection, in particular those grouped under ‘*Mouvance*, Transformation’.³⁵ Anne Baden-Daintree charts the reorderings and repurposings of *Vndo þi dore*, a lyric derived from the Song of Songs, in its different manuscript versions; Katherine Zieman maps the way in which small text units drawn from diverse parts of the Rollean *œuvre* are stitched together to form new lyrics; Julia Boffey observes the ability of succinct lyric statements to allude to much larger bodies of textual materials beyond their immediate parameters.³⁶

How, in addition, should we react to the lyric interpolated into the midst of writing of a different generic character altogether? How is it informed by the textual material that surrounds it, and how does it modify that material in turn? Elizabeth Robertson considers the effect of the serried lyric interventions in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book 2, on our perception of Criseyde’s surrender to love, noting how they encode submerged references to violence beyond the ken of the conscious purview of the narrative at this point. Natalie Jones attends to the textual ‘hinterland’ of *Ihesus woundes so wide*, examining its intercalation into a longer devotional prose treatise in the single manuscript in which it survives.

Finally, the intractable question of genre definition has once again returned to the fore. Jonathan Culler’s influential book *Theory of the Lyric* (2015) attempts to settle the question by proposing various ‘constants’ of lyric voice, form and behaviour, through history. As is so often the case, though, his panoramic account effectively jumps straight from Pindar and Horace to the Renaissance, Romantic and modern corpus, marginalising the medieval lyric, whose practical and didactic purposes map particularly problematically onto this classically oriented grand narrative. Ingrid Nelson’s *Lyric Tactics: Poetry, Genre and Practice in Late Medieval England* (2017), a book-length study devoted by contrast to the medieval lyric, takes a very different tack, heavily inflected by De Certeau.³⁷ Working against Culler’s belief in transhistorical essences, she identifies the lyric genre as ad hoc, improvisatory and, above all, ‘tactical’, carving out ‘makeshift pathways among institutional structures’, and nimbly insinuating itself around longer texts.³⁸ Here, genre becomes not a set of identities but a type of *practice*,

34 Butterfield, ‘Why Medieval Lyric?’, pp. 336, 329.

35 The term *mouvance* was first coined by Paul Zumthor in 1972 to describe the high levels of textual variation discernible between different manuscript versions of a single poem. Because of this mobility he argued that texts should not be seen as possessions of a single author in the modern sense, but as productions that might be indefinitely reworked by others: *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris, 1972).

36 See also, Whitehead, who charts the changing forms and uses of *Stond wel*, *moder*, and two related Middle English lyrics, in their extant manuscripts.

37 M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA, 1984).

38 Nelson, *Lyric Tactics*, pp. 4, 11.

an agility, if you like, to squeeze into small spaces and take advantage of cracks and openings. This collection certainly attends to lyrics that seem to behave in this fashion: Mary C. Flannery's *Tutivillus* lyric appended to the end of the Douce *Piers Plowman*, Michael P. Kuczynski's *All Other Love* pencilled into a manuscript otherwise populated by Latin canon law and theology. However, many of our other short poems are markedly less tactical and adaptive, situated stably at the centre of author-based collections, and attributed to a named poet (Audelay, Lydgate, Chaucer, Charles d'Orléans), and it seems wisest to allow this diverse range of dispositions and behaviours to speak for themselves rather than seeking to limit the field one way or the other.

The essays in this volume and the lyrics that they expound offer a snapshot of the vernacular poets and groups of poems that seem to be commanding interest at the present time: the religious corpora of Rolle, Lydgate and Audelay, the love poems of Charles d'Orléans, Chaucer reread by Robertson and others as a lyric poet,³⁹ the poem *On God Ureisun of Ure Lefdi* that accompanies the *Wooing Group* texts, but has been largely excluded from their analysis. It is brought to light here by Annie Sutherland, and explored and enjoyed from a primarily literary perspective. In five or ten years time, this list will have changed, and the checklist of approaches will have shifted to reflect new ways of thinking about poems. This volume stands as a snapshot of the present time, dedicated to an inclusive definition of the short poem and to the value of exploratory close reading. We hope it will prove useful.

39 See also, Nelson's chapter on 'Antigone's Song' within Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *Lyric Tactics*, pp. 88–116.

Editing Issues in Middle English Lyrics

Thomas G. Duncan

In 1979, in his edition of *Medieval English Songs*, Eric Dobson castigated the established practice of the then chief lyric collections where:

[T]he texts of the manuscripts, as read by the editors, are mostly printed without even the most obvious necessary changes: abnormal spellings, false forms, bad rhyme and worse metre, irregular or impossible accident and syntax, and even sheer nonsense left uncorrected.¹

Why this lamentable failure of editors to edit? The answer lay partly in the chaotically corrupt state in which Middle English lyrics have survived. However incredible it may seem, where these lyrics are found in multiple copies, in not a single instance are any two versions of any one lyric found to be identical. Textual variations in different copies of the same lyric frequently manifest differences in wording, in word order, in order of lines, and even in order of stanzas, differences sometimes so bizarre as to suggest that scribes must not only often have copied carelessly but may sometimes have done so from memory, and often from bad memory at that. Indeed, as in the instances where lyrics survive in shorter and longer versions, it is evident that rewriting sometimes entered into the transmission process. This state of affairs gave rise to the assumption that Middle English lyrics were, by and large, corrupt beyond repair, and that the traditional procedures of textual criticism revered by editors of previous generations were defeated from the start. In particular, it seemed impossible to analyse surviving manuscripts in terms of the stemmata of classical editorial procedure whereby manuscript superiority leading to the privileging of more authoritative readings could be established.

Yet another important requirement of traditional editorial practice was lacking. As E. T. Donaldson observed concerning Chaucer, 'it is impossible to edit at all without having in mind some fairly strong preconception concerning

For another essay in this volume similarly focused on editing issues, see Chapter 4, Michael P. Kuczynski, 'Textual and Affective Stability in *All Other Love is Like the Moon*', pp. 57–70.

1 E. J. Dobson and F. Ll. Harrison, *Medieval English Songs* (London, 1979), p. 27, b.

the metre.² Whether one thinks of classical Latin poetry or, indeed, of *Beowulf*, metre has played a vital role in arriving at editorial decisions. In the case of Middle English lyrics, however, one will search the older standard editions in vain for any sustained discussion of metre. A notion commonly, albeit often tacitly, accepted was that lyric scansion was appropriately to be analysed in terms of the number of stresses per line. G. L. Brook, the editor of the standard edition of the *Harley Lyrics*, briefly outlined this view. According to Brook, in these lyrics, stressed and unstressed syllables ‘alternate fairly evenly as in Modern English versification’. Nevertheless, some lines have ‘fewer stresses than we should expect’; and although Brook accepts that ‘some of these lines may be corrupt’, he takes the view that it is ‘better to regard the occasional substitution of a three-stress for a four-stress line as a form of licence to avoid monotony’.³ However, such an account of metre involves questionable assumptions. One is that a medieval reader would have entertained the same aesthetic responses as G. L. Brook. Yet, would a Middle English reader or poet necessarily have shared Brook’s sense of ‘monotony’? If anything, the evidence tells against any such view. Thus, in a poem so carefully crafted as the Harley lyric, *Weping hath myn wongës wet*,⁴ where each stanza concludes with a quatrain of ‘three-stress’ lines, it seems gratuitous to assume that out of twenty-four such lines one should happen to be a ‘four-stress’ line simply ‘to avoid monotony’. Yet this anomaly, at line 59, was accepted by Brook without question or comment.

A second and equally dubious assumption was the notion that it was satisfactory to describe this verse simply in terms of the number of stressed syllables per line. Two obvious problems immediately suggest themselves. The first is that it is often unclear what is to count as a ‘stressed syllable’; is it a syllable carrying ‘natural’ stress, or perhaps ‘metrical’, or perhaps ‘rhetorical’ stress? A second, and even more serious issue is that the question of unstressed syllables is left out of account. It had often been assumed that Middle English poets, accustomed to a measure of flexibility with regard to the number of unstressed syllables in traditional native alliterative verse, were happy with some variation in the syllable-count of their lines even when writing non-alliterative, stanzaic verse. However true of some looser verse, unsupported by any systematic analysis this view was hardly more than a sweeping generalisation. Inevitably, then, in the absence of some fairly strong preconception concerning the metre, it is not surprising that earlier editors often found it impossible, with any confidence, to resort to emendation *metri causa*.

Granted, then, that earlier scholars may have been inhibited by reservations as regards the applicability to Middle English lyrics of traditional editorial procedures and, furthermore, were severely limited by the lack of any adequate concept of metrical analysis, it is, perhaps, not surprising that what they offered were

2 E. T. Donaldson, ‘The Manuscripts of Chaucer’s Works and Their Use’, *Writers and their Background: Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. D. Brewer (London, 1974), p. 99.

3 Brook, p. 18.

4 Duncan, I, 27, pp. 78–9.

virtually diplomatic editions, that is to say, transcriptions of the manuscript texts in which attempts at editing were, at best, minimal and sporadic. Nevertheless, editions of this kind by such major scholars as Carleton Brown in the 1920s and 1930s, and G. L. Brook and Rossell Hope Robbins in the 1940s and 1950s, did indeed become 'standard' in so far as they were forerunners in their day and long continued to be the main source of the texts printed in subsequent anthologies and selections. Notably, however, in one such, the Norton Critical Edition of 1974, the editors, Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman, in acknowledging that their texts were mainly derived from Brown, Robbins and Brook, observed that 'a new edition, with variants, of the complete corpus of lyrics, based on modern editorial procedures, remains a *desideratum*.'⁵

What modern editorial procedures might Luria and Hoffman have had in mind? Doubtless one was the abandonment of recension as an indispensable part of the editorial process. By 1974, it was no longer the case that variant readings lacking the authoritative status derived from manuscript stemmata were automatically rejected as suspect or even worthless. Already in 1960, a radically new editorial approach had appeared in the 'Introduction' to George Kane's edition of the A-text of *Piers Plowman*.⁶ It no longer mattered if, as in the case of Middle English lyrics surviving in multiple copies, it proved impossible to construct plausible stemmata. It was now open to an editor to take account of all extant readings in seeking to establish a 'good' text.

But what of the lack of a metrical hypothesis adequate to the editorial task? No advance had been made on this front. Two obvious obstacles stood in the way of arriving at such a hypothesis. First, no contemporary account of the metrical principles and practices of Middle English lyric poets has survived, if, indeed, any such treatise was ever written. Second, whereas it is clear to a present-day reader how many syllables are to be pronounced in a modern English text, in a Middle English text this is far from immediately self-evident. In seeking a defensible metrical hypothesis it has therefore been necessary in the first place to seek evidence independent of the actual written texts. Two such sources of evidence suggested themselves: one was the verse tradition from which Middle English stanzaic lyrics derived, French and Latin songs; the other was the music that survived with some Middle English lyrics.

In seeking a defensible metrical hypothesis it seemed reasonable to begin by considering the evidence of the verse tradition of French and Latin songs. A fundamental requirement of a song is that its words should fit the tune, and do so for all stanzas, a requirement that calls for a considerable degree of regularity. From a study of troubadour and *trouvère* songs, John Stevens concluded that in the matching of words and music the 'most important single controlling factor

5 M. S. Luria and R. L. Hoffman, eds, *Middle English Lyrics* (New York and London, 1974), p. ix.

6 G. Kane, ed., *Piers Plowman: The A-Version* (London, 1960).